

The Nexus between Perception and Human Trafficking Prevalence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is modern-day slavery that poses grievous socio-economic consequences in the Nigerian society. Trafficking in persons from Nigeria has taken varied forms and has been on the increase over the years. Nigeria is subject to both internal and international flows of human trafficking. The country also serves as a transit corridor through which traffickers convey their victims to other countries. Empirical studies have focused on the socio-economic effects of human trafficking to the neglect of the impact of individual and societal perception on the crime. This study, therefore, examined the influence of individual/ societal awareness and perception on the prevalence of human trafficking. Data were collected from both the victims of trafficking and randomly selected households across the country. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were also held at various locations to compliment questionnaire administration. Findings showed significant variations in the level of awareness and how different ethnic groups perceive the practice of human trafficking. This hinders the efforts of government at coordinating resources to eradicate the menace in the country. A comprehensive awareness and enlightenment programmes are recommended to reduce the spate of trafficking in persons.

Key words: Trafficking, awareness, perception, culture, enlightenment.

Introduction

Human trafficking, like slavery, is a crime against the individual and the society at large. Ironically, Nigeria has been named by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [1] as among eight countries considered as the highest perpetrators of human trafficking in the world predominantly for exploitative purposes. This had become a huge source of embarrassment to the integrity of Nigeria as a nation.

The fact that the decisions of people are based on the vagaries of perception forms the basis for much philosophical discourse, literary design, and research in the social and behavioural sciences. Human trafficking is clearly a dynamic process, and must be approached as such. Factors influencing the flow of people are constantly changing along with shifts in the social, cultural and economic conditions of a country [2]. Perception, which is a process of the conscious of an object, place or phenomenon, is one of the oldest fields in psychology. It involves the organization, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to present and understand the environment. Perception is not the passive receipt of signals but can be shaped by learning, memory, status and expectation [3].

A common finding across many different kinds of perception is that the perceived qualities of a phenomenon can be affected by the qualities of context. Thus, each individual has his own mental map of the world and it is very likely that each of these maps is unique and denotes perception by different individuals. This is true of the way most trafficked persons perceive economic opportunities and better environment in their intended destinations which prompted their acceptance of the deceptive offers of the traffickers and the subsequent exploitations [4]. In a similar vein, the perception of human trafficking and certain cultural practices such as child fostering as alternative ways of escaping from poverty may encourage many households to hand over their children to traffickers with the hope of getting better returns from such practices [5].

Many 'destination choice' studies including [6] and [7] have shown that migrants rank a list of potential destinations according to their perceived desirability. Each individual usually selects his variables and weighs them according to his own inclinations. He further based the choices of his affiliation with others, for instance a family or

household, whose collective opinion may be more important than his own in an actual decision to move.

In Nigeria, as in many other countries of the world, conscious steps are being taken to address the problem of human trafficking, even though the efforts are yet to fully suppress the practice [8]. There has been a great increase in the national attention to human trafficking since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol in 2000. In addition, national and regional guidelines have been adopted on the implementation of multiple initiatives aimed at preventing trafficking in persons, identifying and providing support for victims, apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators of the crime of trafficking. But rather than abate, the crime is on the increase because the root causes of the practice are yet to be identified and adequately addressed.

There are many reasons to studying the perceptive aspects of the crime in Nigeria. Although, a fair amount of research has been done on the movement of trafficked victims from Nigeria to European countries [9], [10], [11] and [12] however, these studies focused attention mainly on the socio-economic effects of human trafficking across borders to the neglect of the socio-cultural practices and perception of the people as they influence trafficking in persons. Most of the existing literature treated the phenomenon as spontaneous cases, with discrete socio-economic costs rather than a continuous socio-cultural practice. Since there is usually no single or universal factor that leads to a person being trafficked, there is therefore the need to review the factors responsible for the prevalence of human trafficking practices in certain parts of the country than others.

Objectives

The main objectives of the research are to:

1. Examine the spatial spread of human trafficking prevalence in Nigeria
2. Analyze the relationship between perception and human trafficking prevalence

Hypothesis

This study is conceptualized on a single hypothesis thus: there is no significant relationship between societal perception and incidence of human trafficking in Nigeria.

Methods

A survey research design was employed for the study. Nigeria is a Federal Republic made up of 36 federated states; 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and a Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Nigeria is also divided into six geo-political zones: the North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East and South-South [13]. Samples of respondents were randomly selected from human trafficking rehabilitation shelters across the federating states. Data collection was carried out in two phases; the reconnaissance and detailed field work. The first phase involved periodic visits to human trafficking rehabilitation shelters and relevant non-governmental organizations. This period involves preliminary dialogues with social workers, opinion leaders as well as interactions with commercial sex workers, street hawkers, beggars' assistance as well as house helps who are the purported victims of trafficking. The second phase of the research work involved in-depth interview sessions.

The main instrument of primary data collection for this research was in-depth interviews through the administration of two structured questionnaires. The first questionnaire focused on the origin, demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the trafficked persons. In light of the apparent complex nature of causes of trafficking in persons, victims of trafficking were asked to respond to questions such as: What was the most important factor that motivated you to join the trafficking chain? Who facilitated your movement? Did you have any a prior knowledge of your intended destination? Did your family members approve and/or support your decision to migrate? What are your plans for the future? Responses from 500 victims of trafficking were obtained. The sample consisted of rescued and deported victims of trafficking who have experience different stages of trafficking in persons and were undergoing rehabilitation activities.

The second questionnaire addresses societal awareness and perception of human trafficking practices. Thirty household heads were randomly selected at each location in three states within each of the six geo-political zones. During the field survey, focus group discussions (FGD) and oral interviews were also conducted to compliment the questionnaire administration.

Data and Statistical analysis

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using relevant statistical methods including descriptive statistics like frequency count, mean, mode, sum and total and cartograms. These helped in summarizing the data as well as depicting trends in the data, thereby serving as explanatory tools. Inferential statistics, Kappa statistics (k) for multiple raters was used to test the hypothesis. This analytical tool is used to test the consistency of values and is employed when there are more than two raters or subjects. The determination of Kappa (k) value for occurrence is demonstrated as follows:

$$K = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^k 1 \dot{p}_j q_j / k_j}{\sum_{j=1}^k 1 \dot{p}_j q_j} \quad (1)$$

This is derivable from:

$$m = \sum_{j=1}^k 1 \dot{p}_j = 1 \dot{x} \quad (2)$$

$$\dot{m} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n m}{n} \quad (3)$$

$$\dot{p} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x}{n \times \dot{m}} \quad (4)$$

$$k_j = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_{ij} (m - x_{ij})}{nm(m-1) \dot{p}_j q_j} \quad (5)$$

Where: m = number of different raters

x_{ij} = number of ratings on a subject

i = subject

n = number of subjects

j = category of rating

k = number of category

\dot{m} = mean number of rating per subject

\dot{p}_j = overall proportion of ratings

q_j = overall proportion of non ratings

k_j = kappa value per category

k = overall kappa value

Kappa (k) statistics for multiple raters is based on the assumption that a perfect agreement will exist when $k = 1.00$. Also, a high degree of agreement beyond chance is said to occur when Kappa value is $0.75 \leq k \leq 1.00$. This means that there is no

divergence in responses. In addition when $0.40 \leq k < 0.75$, a fair or good agreement is said to exist which gives the indication that these could be the possibilities of a divergence in opinion. Finally, when $k < 0.40$, there is said to the existence of low agreement beyond chance.

Results and Discussion

Generally, the number of officially identified victims of trafficking is low in Nigeria despite daily reported cases of youths and children that are being trafficked to and within the zones as well as to foreign countries. Some of the challenges are related to definitional issues, while others are related to the perception of the people as to what really constitute human trafficking [14]. While the *act of human trafficking* (i.e. the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receiving of persons), is reflected in the relevant sections of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act of the Federal Government of Nigeria [15], differences occur among the thirty six states as well as within the geo-political zones in relation to what constitute exploitative purposes. Even when authorities are in contact with trafficked persons, they may not be identified as having been trafficked.

Spatial Spread of Trafficked Persons

The incidence of human trafficking varied among different federating states within the country, both in terms of volume and types (internal or external). Although the incidence of trafficking in persons occurred in every state irrespective of tribe or ethnicity, however, the number of victims caught in the web of the traffickers differs from one state to the other. In order of magnitude for the first ten most affected states in Nigeria by the prevalence of human trafficking, Edo State (12.7%) ranked highest. This is followed sequentially by Benue (8.2%), Akwa Ibom (7.6%), Kogi (5.0%), Rivers (4.8%), FCT (4.6%), Anambra (4.4%), Borno (4.4%), Cross River (4.2%), and Delta (4.2%).

Although Edo state recorded the highest percentage of overall trafficked persons, there were however more external victims of trafficking from the state than internally trafficked persons. On the other hand Benue State recorded the highest number of internally rescued victims of trafficking 16.1 per cent. High incidence of internal human trafficking was also recorded in Kogi State with 24.1 percent share of the total victims from the zone and 9.4

percent contribution to the national average. Another important state where human trafficking is highly prevalence is Akwa Ibom. However, many trafficked persons from the state were engaged domestic servitude within the country rather than international trafficking that is common among neighbouring states. Akwa Ibom state accounted for 12.9 per cent of the sampled internally trafficked persons, while only 3 percent of international victims of trafficking originated from the state.

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) serves more as destination for internally trafficked persons than being a source. The Territory however recorded the highest percentage (44%) of internationally trafficked persons reported within the North Central zone. Other states within the zone: Kwara (1.0%), Nasarawa (1.4%), Niger (1.6%), and Plateau state (2.3%) also produced trafficked persons but not as many as some other states.

This study also shows that the practice of international trafficking in persons for commercial sex works and other exploitative purposes is predominant in the southern states of Edo (20.4%), Rivers (8.6%), Cross River (7.1%), Anambra (6.8%), Delta (6.4%), Bayelsa (5.7%), Ebonyi (5.4%), and Imo (3.2%). The Federal Capital Territory (5.7%) and Borno state (5.0%) also produced substantial number of international trafficked persons and therefore fall within the ten most endemic states involved in external trafficking in persons.

In terms of the magnitude of occurrence of internal trafficking in persons mostly for domestic servitudes, farm labour, hawking and street begging, the incidence is more pronounced in Benue (16.4%), Akwa Ibom (13.2%), Kogi (9.5%), Kano (4.1%), Jigawa (4.1%), Borno (3.6%), Edo (3.6%), Kaduna (3.6%), Kwara (3.6%) and Niger (3.6%) states respectively.

The six states that make up the South western zone: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo states, altogether contributed only 3 per cent to the total number of rescued victims within the sample frame. Out of these, Lagos State alone accounted for 47 per cent of the entire victims from the zone. The prevalence rate of 1.4 percent recorded in Lagos state was however below the estimated 2.7 percent for the entire country. Apart from Lagos, other states: Ekiti (0.001%), Ogun (0.58%), Ondo (0.39%),

Osun (0.19%) and Oyo (0.19%) accounted for very low percentages of trafficked persons.

Awareness and Perception of Human trafficking

Perception is not a passive reception of phenomenon. It can be shaped by learning, status and expectation. The level of awareness of dangers involved in human trafficking practices plays a significant role in people's perception and the way they get involved in this criminal act across different states. The outcome of household interviews showed that the rate of awareness, understanding and perception of the incidence of human trafficking differs from one state to another and even within each state.

In the northern parts of Nigeria, numerous Almajiri children who should be classified as trafficked children were perceived by the respondents to be voluntary migrant pupils who fend for themselves during the day but return to their various tutors (mallams) in the evening for Koranic studies. During a focus group discussion in Kano, one of the participants asserted thus:

“Almajiri children are genuine people. Although they are poor, they are not trafficked persons. Prostitutes from the South are the only trafficked persons that we have here...”

A similar form of perception was also recorded in the Bauchi state, where 87% of the respondents considered only prostitutes to qualify as trafficked victims. To them every other forms of migration, no matter how exploitative it may be are adjudged to be economic migration and as such should be encouraged. In Benue state, 92 percent of households are aware of human trafficking for domestic servitudes and farm labour, but 78.4 percent of respondents perceived the practice to be a traditional migration culture of the people which predate colonial era in Nigeria. Here human trafficking for forced labour and domestic servitude is considered as voluntary labour migration accepted by various households.

In some other cases, victims of trafficking are often perceived to undergo severe psychological distress in order to survive. Many of the exploitative situations in which the victims pass through are

often accepted by them as a harsh reality of life. They often consider such as the only way to earn income in the absence of safer or more viable alternatives. These victims may not even show signs of harm when in contact with the authorities or service providers. This is evident in the responses from household heads in Anambra and Ebonyi states where 72% of respondents considered child labour and trafficking in persons as training ground with temporary hardship which prepared the seemingly victims for the task of adulthood.

In Edo state 87 per cent of the respondents exhibited a high level of awareness of the practice of human trafficking, however 76 per cent supported the practice as they did not see anything wrong in international trafficking even for commercial sex works. Here human trafficking is perceived as a normal way of life that sometimes upgrades family status. Above 60 percent of respondents in Benin City confirmed that they have members of their household (majority of them females) in Italy, Spain or Netherlands but did not specify occupations of such family members in those countries. They also attributed some developmental projects in the communities to the remittances repatriated from abroad through human trafficking business in Italy. In situations like this, human trafficking is perceived to be a source of wealth creation to the extent that 68% of the respondents promised their support and encouragement for any member of their household that is willing to travel abroad either through human smugglers or traffickers. One of the participants in a focus group discussion session, a young female undergraduate, responded thus:

“...There is nothing wrong about it (i.e human trafficking) in as much as one can get a good madam to take one there (i.e. foreign country). One will make hard currencies out of it. After all, it is better than armed robbery and other dubious means of making fast money...”

Conversely however, the level of awareness of the crime of trafficking is generally low in the states that constitute the southwestern Nigeria. Even though Lagos serves as a major destination for internally trafficked persons, over 70 percent of the respondents were not aware of the practice but only

considered trafficked victims including house helps, domestic servitude, and numerous street hawkers as labour migrants seeking better opportunity in the city.

Across the various states, socio-economic characteristics such as age, sex, occupation, marital status or religious affiliation of individual participants have no significant effect on the perception of human trafficking. However, personal aspirations and societal norms and culture, exert greater influence on awareness and perception of human trafficking.

Relationship between Perception and Human Trafficking Prevalence

Generally, the number of officially identified victims of trafficking is low in Nigeria despite daily reported cases of youths and children that are being trafficked to and within the zones as well as to foreign countries. Some of the challenges are related to definitional issues, while others are related to the perception of the people as to what really constitute human trafficking.

It was observed that all the thirty six states in the country experienced internal trafficking of children to urban areas for exploitative purposes. Apart from internal trafficking, every state also experienced international trafficking of people, in most cases, girls and young women for commercial sex works. It was also observed that the most important source regions of internal trafficking for forced labour are Benue and Akwa Ibom states while the Edo, Delta and Rivers recorded the highest number of international human trafficking, mostly for commercial sex works.

The incidence of human trafficking that occurs at varied magnitude among the states was significantly related to the societal perception of the affected source regions. Statistically, there is no divergence in the ratings of mental maps, prior knowledge of intended destinations, perception of good returns and family support to the decision to migrate by the victims of trafficking. With a Kappa value of $k = 0.78$ a high degree of agreement beyond chance occurred in the responses of the rehabilitated victims. A positive relationship $r = 0.65$ also exist between number of trafficked victims from each state and household acceptance of the practice of human trafficking. Thus, areas where trafficking in persons

were perceived positively, equally recorded high rate of victims. Hence the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between societal perception and incidence of human trafficking is thereby rejected.

In order to redress the rising spate of human trafficking in Nigeria, the Federal Government has set up machineries and embarked on legislations while aligning with international protocols as both preventive and deterrent measures. In some states in Nigeria there are basic policies on the intervention of the crime while in others the few interventions already in place are not designed in a proper context and fail to take account of the situation in neighbouring states. With such perception and approach, resources are wasted and minimal impact is achieved. It is therefore important to embark on re-orientation of the people through persistent education and enlightenment right from the grassroots so that the crime of trafficking could be eradicated.

At the international scale, perception of human trafficking depends, to a large extent, on whether a country is a country of origin, transit or destination [16]. The resulting perceptions can dominate policies and responses, even though trafficking violates the rights of victims at every stage in the chain [17]. Some countries of origin perceive international human trafficking as necessary evil which could hardly be avoided. Transit countries on the other hand are more likely to perceive trafficking as a non-national issue and this is a major obstacle to the control of national borders and coastlines. Countries of destination tend to show some indifference, as the problem originated in another country and does not concern their own children

This political misperception has direct implications for victims. Despite the intercontinental nature of human trafficking problem, the crime is rarely understood as a trans-border phenomenon with direct implications for government accountability [18]. With such perception and approach, resources are wasted and minimal impact is achieved. This is also true of the situation in Nigeria where efforts of the Federal Government recorded minimum achievement because certain socio-cultural practices in some societies encourage the continuity of the crime.

Limitations

This research work was carried out in Nigeria based on de-facto information and assessment of the Victims of Trafficking (VOT) who have experienced various stages of subjugation in human trafficking between 2004 and 2012. The victims of trafficking that featured in the study were either deported from foreign countries or rescued within the borders of Nigeria. These victims of trafficking were as at the time of the field survey in 2013 undergoing rehabilitation at the shelters prior to their reintegration to the society. Useful information was also provided by some rescuers and by immigration officers handling the cases of deportees.

The study did not attempt to incorporate the numerous victims of human trafficking who are currently under the captivity and control of traffickers in Nigeria and in foreign countries due to limited resources and time available for the study. Information gathering and interviews were limited to rescued victims in Nigeria.

Also, due to the criminal nature of human trafficking, data on its volume, spatial spread, temporal pattern and magnitude remain inadequate. Majority of the empirical studies used heads household as basis of primary data collection rather than the victims of trafficking who have experienced the reality of human trafficking practices. As a result, some of the existing data on human trafficking were based on assumptions and estimates which could not be relied upon.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the culture and context within which people live is an important factor in their motivation to migrate or not. Different perception of human trafficking combined with varying levels of public awareness and differences in socio-cultural practices in each region have created a varied level of policy responses to the eradication of human trafficking. This therefore does not encourage a uniform action and commitment to redress the spate of human trafficking. As such, before trying to implement new government policies in the pursuit of eradicating the menace it may be advisable to conduct an investigation into the present culture of the people, in particular to uncover their values. A comprehensive education, awareness campaign and enlightenment programmes are therefore strongly

recommended to reduce the spate of trafficking in persons

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